THE REVIVAL OF FRENCH TRADE UNIONISM

THE DOCUMENT reproduced on pages 7–10 of this issue is one of the most significant that have come out of France since the armistice, and is worthy of serious study by those who are interested—as all English Trade Unionists must be—in the revival of Trade Union activity in France. If, however, its meaning is to be fully understood, the circumstances of its production and the tone of its contents call for some explanation—the former because the difficulties of French Trade Unionists today and during the immediate past are only imperfectly understood here; the latter because the matter and vocabulary of the Manifesto are of necessity conditioned by the history and traditions of the French Trade Union movement, both very different from our own.

TRADE UNION RESISTANCE

Many British Trade-Unionists, including some in high places, appear to have accepted without question the view, carefully fostered by Dr. Goebbels, that their opposite numbers in France have gone over *en bloc* either to Berlin or to Vichy, sacrificing whatever principles they may once have had and tamely accepting the prospect of ultimate and total absorption by the Nazi machine. This view, as an earlier number of *France and Britain* tried to show, is far from accurate. It is true that when the military collapse came, French Trade Unionism, divided in leadership, its membership weakened by mobilisation on a scale even yet not seen in this country, its organisation disrupted and its physical cohesion broken by the general and disordered flight towards the South-West, went under for a time along with everything else. It is true that before the war its leaders included a high proportion of pacifists, defeatists and near fifth-columnists, some of whom have openly sold themselves to Germany since the armistice. It is true that Belin, formerly Assistant Secretary of the C.G.T., and now a Vichy Minister, has tried hard to make all the Trade Unions subserve the ends of Nazism and its Vichy puppets. But it is *not* true that this process has met with no opposition, is succeeding or seems likely to succeed. To give details of movements of resistance would be an act of treachery on our part, but some general indications were in fact given in the last number but one of *France and Britain*. To these can now be added the information that, of the four men who undertook the reconstruction of the movement after the capitulation, one was for some weeks under Gestapo arrest and another is closely watched by the Nazis. This fact speaks for itself.

DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH UNIONISM

Before we turn to the Manifesto itself, it is perhaps desirable to say something of the fundamental differences between Trade Unionism here and in France. It is too often forgotten that France was until recently a predominantly agricultural country, and is still not industrialised to anything like the same extent as Great Britain, the U.S.A., Germany or Belgium. The first French census to show a slight numerical preponderance of industrial (including transport) over agricultural workers was that of 1931, when 40% of the working population was employed in industry, as against 37% in agriculture. Of a total of eight and a half million industrial workers, a very large proportion (nearly 20%) were employed in establishments with 10 or fewer employees, while nearly three-quarters of a million ranked as employers and a further one million one hundred thousand as workers on their own account. Every Trade Unionist knows the difficulty of organising workers in very small concerns, even in England, and in France a strong individualist tradition increased all those difficulties. It must be remembered in addition that French industrialism (and therefore French Trade Unionism) developed very late and was very highly localised, being largely concentrated in two main and two subsidiary regions (Paris and the Seine valley, the North and East frontier Departments, Lyons, Marseilles).

All this means that whereas in England the political Labour movement was an offshoot of a strong Trade Union movement and developed later in what was usually close harmony with the industrial side of the movement, a completely different development took place in France. Socialism as a school of political thought had existed there from the 1830's, and as an organised political movement from the late 1870's, while Trade Unions achieved real strength only at the beginning of this century, and even then never reached anything comparable with the might of British Trade Unionism. French Trade Unions were therefore suspicious of the political side of the workers' movement, seeing in the half-dozen Socialist parties which existed up to 1905 both possible rivals and potential factors of division. So they sought deliberately to remain aloof from politics and stated their determination to do so in reiterated

Congress resolutions. In practice, the distinction between the political and industrial sides of the workers' movement was not always as clear as they would have liked, and there were occasions, notably in 1924 and 1936, when the C.G.T. co-operated unofficially with Left Governments. In the latter year, indeed, they produced a scheme for a planned economy which was patently impossible of realisation except as part of a political programme, but they nevertheless continued, as late as 1935, to affirm their detachment from politics. To this friendly rivalry with the political wing of their own movement was added the more serious threat of the so-called Christian (i.e. Catholic) Trade Unions, which had some slight strength in Alsace-Lorraine and smaller followings elsewhere, and the very grave division of forces produced by the Communist scission of 1921, and the subsequent creation of a powerful 'Unitary', or Communist Trade Union Federation. The French Trade Unions were thus in conflict with their political comrades on the one hand and with rival professional organisations on the other.

THE MANIFESTO

These doctrinal preoccupations and organisational rivalries have both left their mark on the Manifesto. Something of the moderation of its language is undoubtedly due to its being signed by both C.G.T. and Catholic Trade Unionists. If it is, it is well worth it, for the fact of co-operation between the two rival bodies in the face of the common oppressor is a hopeful sign. But what must strike the British Trade Unionist most forcibly is the apparent ignoring of insistent political realities, the failure to make any but the vaguest mention of the fact of German occupation and the vague nature of its statements, when (as in Part 3) it does come nearer to politics. These omissions are in fact no more than the product of the historical development just described, and a closer examination of the document shows that when once appropriate verbal respect has been paid to the tradition of political disinterestedness, the authors of the manifesto do get down to realities in a series of declarations heavily charged with political dynamite. The statement of the position of Trade Unionism in the State may read like no more than a denial of long-dead syndicalist trends, but the affirmation in a Hitler-occupied country that the Trade Union movement 'cannot be controlled by the State', the refusal to 'take account of any external pressure' or to recognise 'organisations whose leaders are not freely chosen by the workers and carry out their functions under the guidance of the State', are declarations of war on Vichy and Berlin.

The whole of Part 3 deserves careful reading. Sections A and C, though vague in much of their wording, are nevertheless strong anti-Vichy statements. To blame the capitalist system rather than democratic politicians for the defeat of France is to run counter to the only consistent theme in Vichy propaganda. To claim workers' control of factories may seem out of date here, but it does nevertheless define the corporatist-syndicalism professed by Vichy in a way that Vichy can never accept. Section B reads like a veiled attack on Bedlin and his defeatist friends, while D and E are affirmations of democratic faith, in the face of everything preached by Hitler and his French disciples. Section E, patently, is equally unacceptable to either Berlin or Vichy.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

The final part of the Manifesto, ending with the appeal for organisation, is in many ways the most encouraging. Its cautious wording reflects the difficulties of the situation, but its insistence on the future of democratic France, on the refusal to accept defeat or the defeatist mentality, is a call to resistance to which the French workers are increasingly responding. Like all other documents from German-occupied territory, the Manifesto reached this country only after some delay, so that events have already caught up with it and in some ways left it behind. French Trade Unionists in some regions are already reorganising in secret and the Quislings among their leaders are already being thrown out. Dumoulin, the only reputable Trade Union leader to become openly pro-German, and recently the leader of a deputation which visited Germany and reported favourably on working-class conditions there, has lost his post as Secretary of the *Nord* departmental federation. Vigne and Kléber Legay, of the Miners, who were among his few supporters, have also lost their posts. More important still, the vast movement for the supply of French labour to Germany which these men were backing has failed, and failed so completely that the Nazis are now bringing back to France the machinery which they removed to Germany last year. Their intention is, of course, to try a new line, and persuade the French workers to build German armaments in French factories, but there is every reason to hope that as the temper of the French worker rises, as the clandestine reconstitution of the C.G.T. (already beginning in the South) proceeds, this move will fail as the others have failed. French

Trade Unionism still has a long road to travel and many lessons to learn before it recovers from the disorganisation of defeat and the mistakes of the pre-war years, but it has started on the road and is learning the lessons despite the danger from German bayonets and traitor leaders, in a way that offers every hope for the future.

A Manifesto from French Trade Unionists

In the month of November 1940, 12 *well-known French Trade Unionists—nine of them belonging to the C.G.T. and three to the C.G.T.C.*[1]*—sent to the French Trade Union associations a manifesto, dated from a town in the occupied zone, which set forth for their comrades their views on French Trade Unionism and what it ought to become.*

For obvious reasons it is impossible to divulge the names of the Trade Unionists who signed this manifesto, which we print below in full, but it will be clear, even to the most casual observer, that if the word "resistance" is not actually mentioned in the following text, the spirit behind it is in complete opposition to that of Nazism, of the "Rassemblement National Populaire" of Déat, and of the Vichy Government.

The importance of this document lies in the fact that it is the first attempt at outlining a constructive policy which has been made in France since the Armistice, and that this constructive policy seems to be incompatible with the state of affairs imposed on France by the capitulation.

FRENCH TRADE UNIONISM—What it is, and what it must become.

Despite its inner difficulties, despite the defeat of the country, despite the misery of the working class, French Trade Unionism is still alive. But in order to regain the place to which it has a right in the economic and social life of France it needs to understand its policy.

Should it turn its back on the past ?

Should it attempt to revive the past without taking account of present realities ?

Should it re-define its aims and the means to be used to attain them, not neglecting facts, but remaining faithful to a certain number of essential principles ?

It is these essential questions that a group of French Trade Unionists wish to answer, in no sectarian spirit, without political prejudice, and without regard to any external pressure.

I The Past

In the first place, there can be no question of denying the past. Trade Union activity, under different guises, has been responsible for a steady trend of improvement in working-class standards of life. This evolution has known periods of ascendancy and periods of stagnation, but if one measures its achievements at widely separated intervals, it cannot be denied that its evolution has been in general favourable to the working-class.

The war and the defeat delivered a terrible blow to the work of Trade Unionism. But can one pretend that it was responsible for the disasters which overwhelmed our country, if one remembers that :—

none of the solutions and reforms put forward were applied early enough by any government ;

no French Trade Union group was called upon to take its share of the responsibilities of power ;

Trade Union activity was persecuted in our country at the very moment when the unity of Frenchmen and the collaboration of the working-class in the national task were more necessary than ever ;

the Trade Union organisations, lay or Christian, never ceased to maintain that peace must and could be preserved by international co-operation based on the spirit of justice.

We can go further.

Who was first to criticise the abuses of capitalism ?

Who denounced the dangers of liberalism and exaggerated individualism, at a period when the national economy needed energetic direction by the State ?

Who foresaw the consequences of the armaments race, begun at a time when peace could still have been preserved ?

Who denounced the errors in foreign policy of most of the Governments which have been in power in France since 1919 ?

Who but the French Trade Union movement ?

Those who require proof of these elementary truths need do no more than read the resolutions passed by the different congresses of the C.G.T. and the C.G.T.C., and the "Plans" drawn up by these two bodies.

French Trade Unionism is therefore not responsible for the present situation. But it is none the less true that it made mistakes.

[1] *Confédération générale des travailleurs chrétiens*—the French Catholic Trade Union Federation.

For some of its members, the existence of the Trade Union movement was bound up to too great an extent with that of political parties and a discredited Parliament.
The Trade Union movement too often sacrificed the search for general economic solutions and structural reforms to the satisfaction of immediate demands.
The existence of sectarian or dissident tendencies and of individual policies disturbed working-class unity and reduced the effectiveness of Trade Union activity.

2 The Present

What is the present position of Trade Unionism ?

One must face the fact that the majority of the workers have ceased to support their organisations, in so far as they feel that the latter offer them neither a satisfactory ideology, nor a programme adapted to present circumstances, nor an effective defence of their professional interests.

Moreover, they could not recognise as genuinely representative of the working-class, organisations whose leaders were not freely chosen by themselves, and whose activity was carried on under the guidance of the State.

It is therefore necessary, if we wish to reunite the workers in their unions, to :

affirm, or re-affirm, the ideological principles of French Trade Unionism ;
define the relations which must exist between the unions and the State ;
determine the framework within which the unions are to develop and the methods they may use.

3 Principles of French Trade Unionism

French Trade Unionism must draw its strength from six essential principles :

A. It must be *anti-capitalist*, and in general opposed to all forms of oppression of workers.

B. It must accept the *subordination of individual interest to the general interest.*

C. It must take its *full place in the State, but no more than that place.*

D. It must maintain *respect for individual rights*, without consideration of race, religion or opinions ;

E. It must be *free*, both in its collective activities and in the exercise of the individual liberty of Trade Union members.

F. It must work for *international co-operation of workers* and peoples.

A. *Anti-capitalism.*

The Unions were the first to understand and denounce the responsibility of capitalism for the economic crises and the social and political upheavals of the post-war period.

The financiers and the international trusts, the big joint-stock companies, the employers' combines—economic organisations led by a small number of responsible men and exercising a truly feudal authority—these too often sacrificed the interests of the nation and those of the workers to the preservation or the increase of their profits. They systematically arrested the development of French industrial production by their monetary manœuvres, the export of capital, their refusal to follow other nations in the path of technical progress. *They bear more responsibility for the defeat of our country than any politician*, however venal or incompetent he may be.

The capitalist regime must be followed by a system of collective economy serving the whole community. The idea of *collective profit* must be substituted for that of *individual profit.* Enterprises must henceforth be conducted according to the general lines of a " plan " of production, under the supervision of the State and with the co-operation of the Trade Unions and associations of technical workers. The direction or administration of an enterprise should of course carry with it the full responsibility for all the mistakes made or abuses permitted.

In this way, and only in this way, can unemployment be overcome and conditions of labour improved in a lasting fashion, leading to an improvement in the lot of the workers—the supreme aim of the Trade Union movement.

B. *Subordination of individual interest to the general interest.*

This subordination must take effect in all spheres, and particularly within the unions themselves.

A too strongly-marked individualism has always prevented any co-ordinated collective activity in our country, everyone thinking he had the right, after having expressed his point of view, to impede by his own private activity the application of contrary decisions taken by the majority.

Trade Unionism is a collective movement ; it is not the sum of a large number of small individual movements. Individuals have no value for it except in so far as they serve its cause and not their own.

The whole history of Trade Unionism proves, moreover, that it is by collective action that the defence of individual interests is best assured.

C. *The Place of Trade Unionism in the State.*

The Trade Union movement cannot hope to absorb the State. Neither must it be absorbed by the State.

Trade Unionism, a professional and not a political movement, should play only its own social and economic rôle, which is the defence of the interests of men as producers. The State should play its part of supreme arbiter between all the interests concerned.

These two rôles should not be confused.

Further, Trade Union activity and the sovereignty of the State will both be exercised the more easily as trades and professions are better organised.

This indispensable organisation by trades should not interfere with the activity of inter-trade organisations, which are able to take a general view of economic and social problems, and to carry out a policy of co-ordinating trade and professional organisation.

The complete suppression of the big national inter-trade associations would be a mistake in this respect.

The choice is not between Trade Unionism and corporatism. Both are equally necessary.

The formula for the future is :

A *free Trade Union*, within an *organised trade*, under the *sovereign State.*

In practice, the suppression of the strike as a working-class weapon of defence depends on the sovereignty of the State and the efficacy of its rôle as arbiter. It would be infamous to deprive the workers of all means of action if the State did not guarantee them the strict application of social legislation and the rule of justice in social relations.

The class war, which until now has been a fact rather than a principle, can only disappear by :

radical change of the profit system ;
equality of the parties concerned in collective bargaining ;
a spirit of collaboration between these parties, for which should be substituted, if necessary, the impartial arbitration of the State.

D. *Respect for human rights.*

French Trade Unionism cannot admit in any case, on any excuse, or in any form, distinctions between persons founded on *race, religion, birth, views* or *money.*

Every human being is equally worthy of respect. He has a right to his free and complete development in so far as this is not in opposition to the interests of the community.

In particular, French Trade Unionism cannot admit :

anti-semitism ;
religious persecution ;
limitation of freedom of opinion ;
privileges of wealth.

Furthermore, it rejects any regime which makes of man an unthinking machine, incapable of individual thought and action.

E. *Freedom.*

Trade Unionism was, and still is, founded on the principle of liberty ; it is false to suggest to-day that the defeat of our country was due to the exercise of freedom of the citizens, when the incompetence of our General Staff, the weakness of our administrative bodies and intrigue and waste in industry are its inner causes.

Trade Union freedom must involve :

the right of the workers to think as they wish, and to express in Trade Union gatherings their opinions on trade problems as they understand them ;
the right to representatives of their own choice ;
the right to belong to a union of their own choice, or not to belong to any union at all ;
the right to be free of Trade Union interference in their private lives.

Liberty may carry abuses with it. It is less important to repress these than to avoid their repetition. In this connection, education of the working classes, more than any repressive measures, must provide the workers with the knowledge and the means of thought and action necessary for distinguishing the general interests of the country, the interests of their trade and their true individual interests. It will be the function of the Corporations to organise this working-class education under the supervision of the unions and the State.

F. *International co-operation.*

Even if unions have not the right to usurp the place of the State in the policy of the country, they should nevertheless concern themselves with :

internal conditions of production ;
the lot of workers all over the world ;
co-operation between nations, the source of improved welfare and of progress.

It would indeed be madness to think that our country could live for itself in the future, isolated from the rest of the world and taking no interest in the big international problems, economic and social.

Trade Unionism will have its part to play in the establishment of peace and in the reconstruction of the world.

4 The Future of Trade Unionism

The future of French Trade Unionism depends on :

the future of France ;
her economic and social organisation ;
the men who will lead the country.

We must not despair of the future of France. We must not consider ourselves an inferior nation or people because of the accident of a military defeat. We shall take our place in the world again when and in so far as we ourselves realise what sort of place we are entitled to.

The economic and social organisation of France must make a clean sweep of the mistakes of the past. We have given the fundamental principles of this new organisation.

The men who are to take the lead in the Trade Union movement must fulfil the following conditions :

they must not have a defeated or defeatist mentality ;
they must place general interests before their own private interests ;
they must respect the working-class and be ready to serve it ;
they must have the general and technical knowledge necessary to face present-day problems.

To defend French Trade Unionism, its traditions and its future,
To avoid unemployment and poverty,
To preserve their liberties,

FRENCH WORKERS WILL UNITE !

INSIDE FRANCE

Moral Resistance

THE TIME for armed revolt has not yet come, in France or anywhere else in occupied territory. There is much spasmodic individual resistance, there is cutting of telephone wires, there are mysterious breakdowns in factories, there are aeroplane crashes and other signs of resistance, but nothing spectacular. What does take place on a big scale is the kind of moral resistance of which we have heard so much from Holland and Norway. Demonstrations in cinemas, flowers on the graves of British airmen, slogans chalked on walls—such as *R A F*, *Vive de Gaulle*, or the simple *V*, for victory—German posters torn down and so on are permanent features of French life today. In a Breton town, the German command issued an order forbidding the public to throw ' débris ' at German soldiers, and in Alsace Lorraine restaurant customers were rebuked for giving orders in a loud voice while the Führer was speaking.

These are only a few examples. Equally important, however, are the signs of what we may call ' psychological resistance '. One of Hitler's most potent weapons is the spirit of apathetic, unthinking, humourless acquiescence which the hopelessness of their position induces in a propaganda-ridden Gauleiter-driven population. France is a country with long traditions of individual freedom in which the sight of everybody saying the same thing has never been considered attractive. The French just do not listen to their docile German-controlled wireless or read the docile unanimous press in the occupied zone. After all they were brought up to an unending public quarrel about the principles and practice of government in a democratic republic, and they receive with a cynical disbelief the chorus of slogans in the subservient press, whose inaccuracy—not to say lunacy—is apparent to the most rudimentary political intelligence. They find the Germans both ridiculous and dull. And they do not fail to use at their expense that wit which is one of their most famous national characteristics.

The value of these manifestations is twofold. Firstly it is a safety valve which helps Frenchmen, who are a nation going through the most dreadful experiences of their history, to keep their sanity and that intellectual lucidity which is one of their national glories. Secondly, to those who are acquainted with French history it is a sign of vitality which the conqueror should find ominous. France under Louis XIV was once described as ' an autocracy tempered by songs '—the mocking, punning, witty songs that Frenchmen remember and pass on—and the songs became the Revolution. Today again France is under a dictatorship and the outlook seems black, but the spirit is untamed and the songs are there again—and if not songs, leaflets, written, printed and distributed in secret, mocking the conqueror, encouraging dignity and pride in the national heritage.

Only a few examples from some of these tracts can be given here. Some are angry, some witty, some touching in their dignity. One, published in occupied France, soon after the armistice, gave hints to the French on how to maintain their morale and their dignity and yet get under the skin of the invader. Here is some of the advice it gave :

> You don't know their language or you have forgotten it. If one of them speaks to you in German shake your head, shrug your shoulders—and move on. (3)
>
> Since you have been " occupied " they are always doing marches in your dishonour. Are you going to stand and watch them ? Try looking at the shop windows instead, for at the rate at which their trucks and lorries are filling up, there won't be much to look at for very long. (8)
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> Abandoned by your wireless, by your newspaper, by your party, separated from your family and your